

Toby's Friendship Raid - Orendi's Hovel

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This Story Contains Violence and Strong Language!

Fiddling with a spanner, Toby wasn't sure why he felt the need to be working on Berg. The marvel of space penguin machinery towered over him, glistening in his workshop lights. Poking the Arc Mine fastened to it's launcher housing with the spanner, he looked bored.

"Man, not much to do today. I wonder what Reyna's up to..."

A chime came through the speaker inside Berg's command module. Toby straightened up and tossed the spanner on the floor with a clank. With an adorable gleam in his eyes, he climbed into Berg's command seat and saw an urgent message from Reyna. Glee filled him as he tried to think of ways to impress her.

Slipping off into a daydream, he wondered what it was she could need. Does she need him to ravage a Varelsi sleeper cell on Bliss, only to return triumphant and glorious with loads of treasure to lay at her feet? Or perhaps she needs him to keep her company a while, dazzling her with his quick wit and charm.

Who was he kidding. Smooth talking wasn't really his area. Poking the message icon with his irresistible flipper, he threw on his helmet to be ready for action. The message pulled up, and he couldn't believe what he saw.

Orendi is holed up in her hovel near you and we need her for a mission. Since you're closest, can you go get her and bring her to Nova? We ain't got time to screw around with her weird crap. Get her crazy ass here ASAP.

– Reyna

At first Toby was excited to do something. Now he wasn't sure he wanted to deal with it. Orendi was notorious for being difficult to get on track. She was powerful, sure. But her powers came with some literally crazy side effects. Third degree burns are generally involved with even being on a mission with her.

Toby had never been to Orendi's hovel. It was just a teeny little one bedroom house with a white picket fence on an asteroid near his workshop in the Detritus Ring. It didn't seem all that foreboding, but when you know Orendi it doesn't sound like a very appealing prospect to actually enter what may be an alternate dimension.

Opening a channel to Reyna, Toby waited a moment for her to answer. No answer. He tried again. No answer. Maybe it would be better to try someone else? Shayne usually hung around Reyna. Pulling up Shayne's comm channel, he waited a moment to call. He wasn't good at talking to people, especially teenagers.

Still, he needed to get in contact with Reyna. Sending the comm request, Shayne answered right away. She was sitting on a bench with Aurox behind her, scribbling something on a scroll with his demonically long finger. Next to him was a thrall's skull filled with blood.

"Hey little guy! What can I do for ya?"

Toby froze for a moment, and tried to think of something to say. Shayne crossed her arms and waited patiently.

"Uh sorry to bother you Shayne, but is Reyna there?"

Really? That was all he could muster up? Pathetic.

Shayne laughed, and slapped Aurox on the shoulder behind her. It moved his arm and whatever he was writing on the scroll became smeared. He gave a growl and crumpled up the scroll, reaching for a new one.

"Nope. Not here. Whatcha need Toby?"

Aurox began writing faster on the scroll, dipping his finger into the thrall skull for more ink.

"She told me to go get Orendi, and I just wanted to make sure she knew I was on it!"

Shayne peered back at Aurox, and watched as he was just about to complete his scroll writing. As he wrote out the last rune, it began to glow with fierce energy. At the last moment, Shayne pushed his arm and made him smear blood all over the page. Aurox shouted in anger and looked back at Shayne who was laughing uncontrollably at this point.

"One day I will end you! I swear it child!"

Shayne laughed even harder, then poked his hand with her boomerang.

"Yeah, whatever. Just go do it little guy. She asked me to do it but like hell I'm going into Orendi's place. She scares the crap out of me."

Aurox turned back with the crumpled up the piece of paper and threw it at Shayne's head. Shayne looked sternly back at him and disconnected the comm channel. Toby's heart sank. Guess he should have known he couldn't get Shayne to help. She was always so absorbed in herself, especially with a Djinn to command.

He could never tell whether to feel bad for Aurox or not, because he did have a propensity to kill just about everything in sight. And enjoy it thoroughly. Maybe she's doing Solus a favor?

What about Pendles? He's good at getting in and out quickly. Toby tried to remember how to get a hold of Pendles. He was never really sure, since not even Reyna knew what contracts he had out at any given time.

After the incident with the Lorrian he kept a bit better tabs on what contracts he took. To say that he was loyal to the Rogues would be a mistake, but he has done his best to keep from conflicts of interest. A knock came at the door to his workshop, causing him to glance over at the large garage door that led to the airlock. Starting Berg's reactor core, he wanted to give it time to warm up.

Hopping out of Berg's command seat, he hopped his way over to the door and pressed the hatch toggle near the floor. He had separate panels installed all around the garage. Since he was short and didn't have to ride around in Berg when he was here he decided it would be better to swallow his shame and have them installed. Sometimes they were a cold reminder of his shortcomings. Literally.

As the door slid open, Toby realized it was his lucky day. Who stood on the other side other than Pendles himself?

"Ey' there Tobes. 'ow ya doin? Say, can I get a second opinion on sumfin'?"

His tail extended as he presented a small handful of papers. Toby took them between his fins and fanned them out, glancing at them. Each one had a picture of Toby on them along with a whole lot of text. One picture was a poorly drawn sketch, most likely from Crayon. Burn marks pocked along the sides indicated someone didn't handle it very well.

"Uhh... What are these?"

Looking up at Pendles, his tongue flicked out and he gave a warm smile and opened his arms.

"Why, they're contracts! Proposed ones anyhow. I haven't quite decided which one ta pick. Was wonderin' if you could take a look at em' an' tell me which one was your favorite?"

The twinkle in his eyes made Toby think he enjoyed asking his victim who he should make pay to have him killed.

"Uh..."

Pendles stood there a moment in awkward silence, looking down at Toby. Toby stared at the papers. After a moment, Pendles began to use his tail to point at each contract.

"Some o' these 'ave got some appeal ya know? This one's got a great description, good picture of ya. 'ard to pick one 'cause you're all adorable and such. Although, there's a simple genius to it. Crayon to give ya an idea of what you're after, and some terrible chicken scratch writing. Intriguing dontcha fink?"

Toby didn't know what to say. Looking at the piece of paper, it had a lot of writing but most of it was unlegible. About all he could make out was a small poem.

*Your fins so black
Your helmet so metal
Your face attacks
My heart -*

Turning very quickly into frantic writing in crayon, he wasn't really sure how it was supposed to end.

Toby's eyes grew wide, and anxiety gripped him. He started to breath heavily, and felt a strong need to be in Berg. Pendles laughed and patted him on the head.

"ey, Relax Tobes! I'm not takin' any of the contracts, just thought you might take a pick of your fave. Doesn't everyone like to do that?"

Toby started hyper-ventilating and dropped the papers altogether. Waving his fins around panick set in for a moment before Pendles whipped him across the face with his tail. Toby's breathing steadied and he placed a fin on his face.

"Hey! What was that for?!"

Pendles cocked an eyebrow and started twirling a shuriken between his fingers in his free hand.

"Get a hold of yourself mate! I haven't taken any contracts yet! As far as you know there ain't nuffin to worry about!"

Toby stood in awe a moment. Pendles always perturbed him whenever he was around. He loved to remind you that he could be stalking you as his next prey at any moment. It never really turned out to be much of anything, except that one time Aurox put out a hit on Shayne. That was kinda funny actually.

"Ok, uh thanks Pendles. Say, did Reyna ask you about going to pick up Orendi for a mission?"

Pendles thought a moment, looking intently off into the distance. He walked inside the workshop and began to look around. Toby stood for a while waiting for an answer. His politeness got in the way of his anxiety as Pendles paraded around his workshop for no apparent reason. It took Pendles moving towards Berg slowly before Toby finally spoke up. Loudly.

"Pendles!"

Jumping and turning around, Pendles threw a shuriken with lightning speed, missing Toby's throat by a hair. Toby froze in place with an odd look on his face. Pendles started laughing and walked back over.

"Sorry Tobes, spaced out a minute there. Say, nice place ya got 'ere eh? Got insurance on it? I 'ear the LLC's been passin out special deals to us Battleborn. Shards to fill even the deepest of coffers they say and the like."

Toby looked in bewilderment as he continued to look around while speaking. Only now did he realize why Pendles showed up in person. He was scouting Toby's belongings in case his retrieval of Orendi was less than successful. These are the kinds of friends the Rogues keep. With a sigh and a facepalm, Toby waddled over to Berg and hopped in.

"Pendles. Get out. I'm going to go get Orendi. Stay out of my workshop please. Sorry."

Berg's reactor core was thoroughly warmed up and ready for anything. Toby wondered if this is why Reyna asked him to do it. Was everyone else that afraid of Orendi? Could this be Toby's chance to prove he's not small and weak and scared of everything?

"Why're ya sorry?"

Toby thought for a moment. He wasn't really sure. But there was a reason he was sure.

"I'm sorry that you're still here."

Pendles cocked an eyebrow for an awkward moment. Then he proceeded to laugh heartily as he slithered quickly out the workshop door. Just barely Toby could see Pendles trying to swipe a small canister of the solvent Toby used to clean the plasma burns off of Berg's inner reactor core. It was incredibly expensive and only the LLC produced it, at great cost to anyone besides the LLC.

"Pendles! Give that back!"

It was too late, he had snuck out the door and disappeared. With friends like these, who needs enemies?

Sighing, Toby brought up Berg's console. Activating an atmospheric shield over the cockpit, he readied Berg for a trip across a few asteroids. As the shield was materializing he heard the hum of Pendle's glide ship outside.

"Asshole..." he muttered under his breath.

"What was at Tobes?" He forgot had opened a comm channel earlier. To Pendles.

"Sorry! Sorry!"

Laughter was Pendles' response. Then the channel closed. Toby felt like such a jerk. How could he call his friend an asshole? Remembering seeing his own assassination contracts made him not feel so bad about it.

There was still the matter of retrieving Orendi. A press of a button and a couple commands and Toby was ready to cross the void of space to Orendi's hovel. He wasn't really sure if he was even comfortable doing this, but if Reyna had asked specifically for him then he didn't want to let her down!

Grabbing the controls, the familiar hum of Berg's core comforted him. The brisk smell of burning atmosphere and heated metal filled his nostrils and he took a deep breath in.

"Ah, nothing gives me warm fuzzies like the smell of a badass mech suit. Let's go kick some ass big guy!"

The Readiness Icon in the center of Berg's console was Toby's favorite part of the whole design. It was a small screen with a pixelated penguin that reacted to certain situations. It jumped in place and raised one fin in the air. Pixelated text flashed the words *Let's do it!*

He wasn't sure why, but he knew there would be fighting involved. There's always fighting involved. Although how he could get much fighting in at such a tiny house, he wasn't sure. Either way he needed Berg to get there. It's just a few hops away on various asteroids. A couple big ones here and there, but nothing he couldn't handle. Maybe he'll smash a few of them with an arc mine just for the fun of it.

Space expanded all out in front of him as he opened the garage door. The asteroid he set his shop up on was decently sized. It could fit a couple more workshops on it, which he planned to build on when funds came in. With the varelsi diminishing there wasn't much work to do besides skirmishes here and there between the factions. Toby wasn't into that kind of fighting.

The varelsi and various super villains have left him with enough thrall, robots, and spatial horrors to fight as it is. There was really no need to fight each other. It still happened, sure. Like when the Peacekeepers tried to extradite Whiskey Foxtrot for beating up a random Mike. I guess he had called Whiskey a reject. That's just kind of what happens.

The Rogues had to hold back Ghalt, Benedict, Ernest, and a whole unit of Mikes from taking him. For some reason Oscar Mike was on our side. Something about not fighting his bros. Except he also calls the others his bros too.

Activating Berg's thrusters, he leapt upwards with a burst of speed. Empty space was always a strange feeling. He liked to float in space for hours while he day dreamed. There was just something about spacing out in the middle of space that was insanely relaxing. At the moment however, he didn't have time to day dream.

At least he can use the weightlessness to get right to where he's going. As he floated gracefully through the air in his death machine, Toby noticed a faint red light in the distance. Then the flicker of a few more. Something didn't feel right about them.

He got a feeling he may not be the only one looking for Orendi. Berg's censors flashed as a Jennerit destroyer dropped out of warp over a large asteroid. Atop the huge hunk of space rock was a two story worn down house. Zooming in using the optical enhancer, he noticed a broken white picket fence and even what appeared to be an overgrown lawn.

Toby had never understood why she lived in such a place. He had seen it before many times, with it's atmospheric bubble to keep it habitable outside. How she even came up with the funds for an atmosphere projector was beyond him.

A channel opened with the destroyer, and a thrall commander answered.

"Dis is da Jennerit occupation third fleet commander Grank. Orendi, you are under arrest for, uh, how you say dis one? Defilement? Dats a word? Anyway, de-file-ment of a Jennerit monument. Duh, what's that word mean? Arsen? Ain't that a bit mean? I'm 'ere to arrest her not call 'er an arse."

Toby had to take a moment to really understand what was happening. Orendi was supposedly going to be arrested by one of the most incompetent thrall he'd ever heard. Although, that bode well for how difficult it was going to be to protect her. Obviously not hard at all.

The channel closed after Grank stopped rambling about improper use of words. Toby felt wrong in so many ways. Launch ports in the side of the destroyer opened, while dozens of Jennerit ships flooded out and spread out across the asteroid field.

One patrol ship wasted no time in flying right over to Toby. As it approached a channel opened up, and Berg's Readiness Icon pulled out a wireless microphone headset and placed it on it's head.

"Hey! Guys look! It's the penguin! Yeah he's in a mech suit it's adorable!"

Hooting and hollaring came from the background as the leader laughed. The ship stopped and hovered right in front of Toby. He knew what Jennerit scout ships could do. Mounted turrets and rockets, capable of holding an entire unit of thrall troops or combat droids. This was not a situation to take lightly.

"Listen, little guy. We were wondering if we could get a picture. The guys and I have heard about you and we *finally* get to see you in person! I can't believe it!"

Or, they are friggin morons and deserve everything they get. Rage filled Toby's mind as he realized he wasn't even a threat to these thrall. They have every means to raze him to the ground. Yet all they can do is ask for a picture?!

"I'm gonna wreck your faces you friggin' troglodytes!"

Berg scanned the ship and determined the best place for an arc mine. Toby caught it quickly, and aimed the arm as swiftly as he could. The Readiness Icon pulled out a pixelated arc mine and tossed it in the air as he lined up the shot.

"Did you hear that?! Bwahaha! You're delightful!"

Toby pulled the trigger with a wicked grin. A burst of energy left the mine seat and launched a ball of death at impressive speed. It connected with the top of the right wing with a satisfying *thud* and crackle, overloading the ship's engines with arc energy. The ship's thrusters popped once and exploded, sending debris from the ship flying into the nothingness.

Berg's Readiness Icon stopped tossing the pixelated arc mine and kissed it before throwing it directly at the screen and exploding. The words *Flawless Victory* flashed as the debris floated off into space.

Realizing that he had just killed a ship full of Thrall, Toby felt a twinge of guilt.

"Sorry! I lost my temper again damnit! Looks like I'll be putting more shards in the tantrum jar."

The tantrum jar was the brain baby of his Kleese. At one point he had convinced Toby that he was a licensed therapist. When Toby asked what a good method to help control his outbursts were, Kleese suggested he keep a rage jar. Kind of like a swear jar, but with outbursts. Kleese also suggested to send him the shards every month as a deterrant from letting his temper get the best of him.

It didn't always work. Ingiting his boosters again, he shot towards the body of the asteroid beneath him and landed Berg on his feet. Chunks of space rock shot away into the void as he landed. Scanning the horizon, he continued to look for more thrall ships.

As he watched the destroyer, flashes of red opened up in the side and more patrol ships came pouring out. Waves of black blobs in the sky that may as well have been flies deftly danced in the air towards Orendi's home. Some broke formation and started heading towards Toby.

"Oh crap! Oh crap! Do they know I'm here?"

A public comm channel opened.

"Ey Ralkus, you secure the perimeter yet? Ralkus? Oy what happened?"

A thrall bonecrusher, Malkus had opened the channel and begun the inquiry. Two patrols sped towards Toby. For a moment he panicked, until he realized they flew right over him and over to the destroyed patrol ship.

"Bloody... Who coulda done dis?" Malkus sounded crushed.

The patrol ships spun in the air, scanning for any signs of enemy movement. As they turned slowly Toby wondered if they had seen him yet. He wanted to get out of there. For sure he would be caught now if he moved.

Fear gripped him as a ship tipped its bow directly at him and began to slowly drift over.

"Oy! Look at dis Malkus! Maybe dis little guy knows wat 'appened to Ralkus!"

A thrall brute named Alkus was the one to signal Malkus. The ships slowly approached Toby and Berg. Toby wanted to feel afraid, but something didn't feel right about that. Why aren't they opening fire?

"It's awright little guy! We ain't gonna hurtcha! Say, you 'appen to see what big baddy did dis to our bruver Ralkus? He was very important to us, part of the gang ya see. We wanna get revenge and all dat. Whadda ya say sport?"

Toby closed his eyes and held his head. Sport? Little guy? These thrall think Toby is inherently incapable of being the one to destroy the ship. They think he's small and weak and couldn't possibly hurt anyone. Anger filled him and he felt his hand grip the trigger on his railgun. In a fit of sheer rage he muttered under his breath.

"Yeah... I saw that big baddy. He's *right here still you jack wagons! Die! Die! Die!*"

Aiming the railgun directly at the left ship's cockpit, he released a fully charged blast that pierced the glass. Screams from Alkus flooded his hearing over the comm channel. One shot to the head will usually do it. The ship veered to the right and clipped the other in the wing, causing it to spin out of control.

Shots began to fire wildly in all directions as it spun. As quickly as he could he projected a force barrier which absorbed some of the shots. Others shattered and bounced off Berg's personal energy shield. Charging another railgun blast, he fired it through the barrier at the ship while it spun. The blast smacked the very tip of the bow, causing it to spin even faster.

Malkus' screams came ringing through the comm system.

"Make it stop! Daddy! I don't like these rides! I wanna do the water park!"

A stream of energy projected out from beneath the ship, creating a strange streak of red light through the air as it spun. Malkus materialized in mid space, though the inertia from the ship spinning ended up flinging him directly at the rock below. Stones shattered and spun in space, clinking off of Berg and the ship.

A massive thrall bonecrusher laid face first. The rock gave way in comedic fashion, tracing a near perfect indent of the thrall through jagged edges. Toby couldn't help but laugh as he slowly wandered over to the edge of the fresh crater. It wasn't every day you got to see a thrall fail so hard.

"Hey look at that! You rock!" Toby shouted as he cackled.

Malkus reached his right arm up and gripped the rock so hard it began to crumble. Pushing himself upward, he came to his knees. Energy crackled and a bubble formed around his head. No doubt an atmospheric bubble. Realizing his enemy was recovering, Toby began to charge a rail gun blast.

A thrall's face is hardly a pretty thing. It's terrifying when they're angry, and Malkus looked pissed.

"You killed my bruver, and my cousin! Alkus! Ralkus! 'ow could you little guy?! *How could you!*"

Stricken with grief, the thrall began sobbing. Tears streaked down his face, falling gently through his breathing bubble and floating off into space. For a brief moment, Toby felt bad for destroying those two ships.

"They never did anything to you!"

Shouting at the top of his lungs, Toby could hear the despair in his shaking voice. Berg's rail gun hummed with a strange eeriness as the thrall broke down sobbing. Looking up at Toby with tears flowing, Tobys heart broke. He felt awful. Even if they were just thrall, they meant something to this one. Maybe they lived their own lives. Have their own struggles. Who was Toby to take their lives?

Sniffling and breathing heavily, Malkus rubbed the tears from his eyes. Looking at Toby, he cocked an awkward half-smile.

"Guess it's alright. You probably just felt freatened. My mistake for intimidating you little guy. I ain't mad or nuffin. Just... I'm gonna miss em bofe!"

He began to half sob again, but pulled up his chin and looked towards his ship.

"Dere will still be a tomorrow. Right little guy?"

Toby's eye twitched, and he gripped the rail gun trigger as tightly as he could with his penguin flippers. Rage filled inside him at the same time he felt grief for this poor thrall. His story seemed moving and inspirational, yet despite all of that he still can't see Toby as a threat. Aiming for Malkus' head. Zooming in. Toby looked directly into Malkus' eyes as he glanced over. Big thrall eyes widened with fear as he realized what was going on.

His non-threat had quickly turned into an imminent threat. As Toby released the trigger, words slipped his mouth in anger at the thrall's insult.

"*Are you fucking sorry?!*"

The rail blast traveled in almost slow motion as it traveled directly at the unsuspecting thrall's forehead. Toby's heart skipped a beat as it connected right between Malkus' eyes. Red filled the space behind him as the familiar mist of death filled the air a moment and dissipated. Shaking with rage, Toby furiously scribbled a note on his command screen.

"Man, this sucks. I've barely left my workshop and I've already spent my week's allowance on the rage jar. My therapist is gonna have a hay day with this one."

Anxiousness lined Toby's voice. Pushing gently off the ground, he kicked in Berg's thrusters and scanned the horizon. Purple light danced off the multitude of space rocks floating effortlessly in space. Dust hung drearily in the violet light. Toby glanced over at the massive planet he now called a home.

"Crazy that this is my home now... So much has happened..."

He wanted to think about what the varelsi had taken, but it just didn't do any good. Over and over it would repeat like a movie stuck on perpetual loop. All of the little details of his old life that seemed so unimportant at the time were the things he'd missed the most.

It had circled his mind so many times that by now he simply looked past it. Better to focus on stuff to smash or fix. That kept his mind off it for the most part. Fighting helped a lot. Perhaps that's why all of Ghalt's Battleborn fought. They had either lost everything they had, or were seeing themselves lose it before their very eyes.

Guess it's natural to want to fight in times of hardship. Even if it's amongst kindred spirits. They can't help but just want to take a shot, jab, stab, bite, kick, whatever helps them *feel* like they have power over the situation. Even if they didn't really have any to begin with.

As Toby pondered all of this, he realized he was spacing out in space again. There was no time for this kind of thinking.

"Oh crap."

Kicking Berg's thrusters in, he managed to reposition himself to aim at the next set of asteroids. He only had a few kilometers to cover through open space before he was at Orendi's place.

Movement near the Jennerit destroyer triggered Berg's censors. Toby zoomed in his interface for a closer look. Five Jennerit transports were speeding directly towards his location.

"Oh double crap."

Despite the odds against him, Toby pushed forward. All he could do was tell himself that Reyna needed him to succeed. Orendi was in danger and she was a rogue. They both needed his help. As the Jennerit ships sped to meet him in battle, Berg detected a warp signature. A tear in space opened for a moment as a massive LLC battle cruiser appeared where the ships used to be.

A comm channel opened up on his display.

"Toby! Just the person I wanted to see! How are you feeling today?
Hmm?"

Doctor Kleese? Something was fishy. He doesn't go out of his way to check on the welfare of his clients. He's made it very clear he's not into the progressive line of thinking of modern day therapists. That's what makes him better than the others.

"I'm doing fine, sir. How are you?"

Toby didn't sound too enthused to hear Doctor Kleese's voice.

"Oh I'll be just dandy after you get Reyna and *replace the library your witch destroyed!*"

That didn't sound good. You'd think Orendi could go at least a week without destroying something of someone else's. Toby was always surprised to come back to his workshop in tact.

"Oh... I can't get a hold of Reyna either. She's also looking for Orendi. I'm sorry!"

Toby knew that if Doctor Kleese was this upset, he would have no problems trying to kill Orendi. Again, the whole fighting all the time thing.

"Toby. As your friend and therapist, you know I will never blame you for the actions of someone else. But if I don't get a hold of Reyna and get this fixed I *cannot be held accountable for the fit of rage that will follow!*"

Toby was taken aback. Doctor Kleese can get angry, sure. Not this kind of angry.

"Um... Doctor Kleese?"

Heavy breathing was all that Toby could hear, then a loud buzzing noise. A female voice barely came through Kleese's comm channel as saying *Resuscitation complete.*

"Gaah! Alright alright! I'm back! Yes Toby?! *What is it?!*"

Toby wasn't sure if he should say it. He meant what he was about to say sincerely out of wanting to help Kleese cope with his anger like he'd helped Toby. But it might not get taken that way. Still, he decided to say it anyway.

"I think you should keep a rage jar too. You seem really strung out."

More angry heavy breathing, and silence for a moment. Then a buzzing noise again.

"Gaah! Twice in one day! I can't handle this! I'll be leaving an... ahem... *ambassador* here to handle the matter! Good day Toby!"

The channel closed and Toby watched as the LLC ship left, but not before a bright light shone beneath it. They had transported someone down to the surface of the asteroid it hovered over. Toby could only guess who Kleese would leave to handle the matter. Phoebe didn't exactly take orders from him. Neither did Marquis. Hell LLC were just generally bad at taking any kind of orders.

"Greeting flesh sacs! I have been dispatched as an ambassador from the Last Light Consortium to help settle the case of the liquified library. Boy, it sure is your unlucky day!"

ISIC. Wow, Kleese *is* pissed. Zooming in, he saw ISIC in his combat chassis firing at nearby Jennerit ships.

"Uh, Hi ISIC. Say, Reyna needs Orendi for a mission, so can we hold off on the case of the uh... Liquified? Really? Library?"

Toby really wasn't sure what to say. All he knew is Reyna needed Orendi for something and he wasn't about to let her down.

"Toby! Say, you're an engineer. I have a question for you. Would you mind taking a look at the failsafe system on my control core after this mission?"

Blasting his thrusters one more time to pick up speed, Toby thought for a second what ISIC would need help on his control core for. It certainly stunk of something no good.

"Uh, what do you need me to do?"

"I want you to remove the failsafe so I can overload my core and finally end this miserable torture I call an existence!"

Figures. With a deep sigh, Toby shook his head. The gap between Toby and ISIC was steadily closing as he drifted through space.

"No ISIC. For the last time, I won't help you kill yourself."

A moment passed and ISIC's icon remained on his UI.

"How about-"

"No, I won't help you destroy existence either."

A sound resembling fingers snapping played through his speakers. Toby repositioned Berg and fired his thrusters, preparing for a hard landing.

"Aw shucks Toby. I was really hoping this time. You don't know what Kleese has been making me do. Since he got control of my AI core, he's programmed me to empty the waste receptacle in his chair."

That did sound like an awful fate. Toby cringed and shivered. He didn't want to know what horrors lay in the waste compartment of someone so old.

"He started eating prunes. He removed the incinerator module from the waste compartment. He doesn't even need me to change it Toby. Please. Help me end this horror I call existence."

To be fair, ISIC did try to destroy the universe. Toby wanted to help, but he knew better. With a huge crash and debris flying everywhere, Toby landed on the asteroid a few yards away from ISIC.

"No."

A deep sigh came from ISIC. Turning and looking at Toby, a hologram of two capital Qs projected on the front of his chassis. Inaudible mumbling came from ISIC, followed by ever stronger sobs.

"Why Toby? Why did they have to program emotion into me?! Why are you all so evil!?"

How did a simple stroll to knock on Orendi's door turn into a clusterfuck of everyone trying to kill her? Oh, right. Orendi brings it upon herself. Toby attempted to open a channel to Orendi, with little luck. He figured simply trying to contact her wouldn't work. Reyna wouldn't have sent him...

Suddenly the channel opened and Orendi began shouting random obscenities.

"MURDDEEEEERRRRRR!!! WWAHAHAHAH!"

Heavy breathing assaulted Toby's ears. She must have had the volume up all the way, because now he felt deaf in one ear.

"Uhhh, Orendi. Reyna needs you for a mission. And the Thrall are coming to try and kill you. So is ISIC."

Heavy breathing intensified, then stopped entirely. ISIC decided to chime in.

"Hello Orendi, I represent the LLC and I am here to reprimand you for-" Orendi didn't want to hear it apparently.

"I'm busy."

Just like that the channel closed. Of course it wouldn't be that easy.

Now, the darkness beyond Solus in the distance was sobering. There wasn't a star in sight, simply faint glimmers of the other planets in the system. Ekkunar shone with a strange orange light in the distance. Tempest was red, but barely visible. ISIC turned towards Orendi's home.

"What a strange creature. I would say it's a shame to kill her, but we both know I don't feel shame."

ISIC always had something to say. Whether it was useful was a different problem entirely.

"Look, ISIC, you can't kill Orendi. I need her for a mission."

ISIC shrugged and looked blankly back at Toby.

"My directive is to bring her back dead or alive. It's also not every day I get an opportunity to see what her home looks like. Which also means an opportunity to burn it to the ground."

Alterior motive or not, Toby could use that time to his advantage. It would be easier to defeat ISIC if he had backup. Hopefully Orendi proves to be backup and not just more fire to stay out of.

"Alright ISIC. We can go in and find her together then. Just do me a favor... Don't kill me too."

The magnus laughed heartily and shook his holographic head with a smile on his face. Blue light crackled and fizzed out of existence as he spoke.

"Oh Toby, you know I can't promise anything. You are such a scamp! Put her there!"

ISIC extended his robo-fist looking for a fist bump. Toby elected not to return the gesture.

"Fine, be that way. Lead on my flightless friend!"

Toby rolled his eyes and set his sights on Orendi's hovel. The atmospheric bubble she employed had holes in it from weapons fire. It was only a matter of time before the whole field destabilized and left her without any air to breathe. If she breathes air anyway.

Berg's Readyness Icon started pointing at a miniature radar with an exclamation point. There were more Jennerit forces readying an attack. Five more patrol ships emerged from the destroyer and sped directly at their location.

"Let's get inside! We need to find Orendi or they'll just keep sending more!"

Toby yelled at ISIC, though he was already pushing his legs towards the small door. They both reached the front door only to realize one folly in their plan: They were too big for the door. ISIC didn't see that as much problem, considering he let loose a charged blast from his arm cannon right at the door.

It bounced off and smacked Berg's energy shield right near the engine. The Readyness Icon began shaking his fist angrily in ISIC's direction.

"Huh, well that's a first. Destruction doesn't get the job done. Any ideas Toby?"

Toby rolled his eyes and thought for a moment. The door was too big for their combat suits. Neither of them could very well leave them. With no other options, Toby shrugged and rang the doorbell.

"WHO IS IT?! WHAT'S THE PASSWORD?! OPEN SESAME! WELCOME COME ON IN!"

Orendi's voice was shrill and annoying as usual. The door opened to a pitch black room beyond. Berg's sensors showed nothing in the house, but reminded him of closing reinforcements.

"Uh, Orendi? If you're in there our mech suits are too big-"

Orendi interrupted him with a tone he'd never heard before. It sounded happy, but bloodthirsty at the same time.

"Toby? Oh it's you! Well I suppose I can lend you a hand. Ha! HAHA! HAHAHAHA!"

A varelsi portal opened beneath them both, swallowing them whole. They didn't fall for long before hitting ground. They also were now in a desolate void of darkness and varelsi.

Skulks clamoured lazily across the purple landscape. Pieces of architecture from various worlds littered a flat land mass that stretched around farther than Toby could visibly see. Hunters crouched next a fire from a branch of Ekkunar's forest, burning what must have at one point been a massive flower.

Veil Walkers floated aimlessly near an entire UPR outpost wedged half-way into the ground.

"Uhh... This was unexpected." Toby was dumbfounded.

ISIC laughed maniacally and began firing at varelsi Skulks.

Unfortunately, this drew the attention of the rest of the varelsi nearby. The hunters stood up and sniffed the air. Drawing their pulse rifles they began moving on Toby and ISIC's position with volleys of dark orbs singeing the air as they passed. Not all missed, as orbs bounced off Berg's personal shield and ISIC's energy barrier.

Toby charged a rail gun blast and launched it at a hunter. At the last moment it dodged out of the way of the projectile and erected a void barrier. That would make it harder to kill. Thankfully for Toby, he had basically the same trick up his sleeve. Projecting an energy barrier in front of him, it floated in a shining hexagonal grid in front of him. ISIC teleported at the hunter and left it stunned as a shockwave was released.

Charging his ion cannon, ISIC unloaded three rounds in the hunter's face before unleashing a charged blast and shattering it in to a thousand dark pieces. The other hunter turned to see his comrade destroyed. Throwing it's pulse rifle to the floor, it pulled out a large blackened blade and charged ISIC.

ISIC hid behind his energy shield. A pixelated frowny face appeared in red characters over the shield as the hunter struck it. Toby charged a railgun blast and unleashed it at the hunter. Berg's icon danced around happily as it struck it's target. Writhing in pain as it's arm was shattered, the hunter jumped back and threw it's sword to the ground. It screeched with a foul noise as more skulks appeared from portals all around.

Veil walkers in the distance distorted and began to advance on Toby and ISIC. Berg's censors beeped as it notified Toby of their new adversaries. Sound around them distorted and a trumpet began to sound in a slow eery fashion. Layers of strange sounds began to assault their ears as more skulks began to launch volleys of dark orbs at their position.

"Yes! Please continue to advance to your proverbial doom! Ha ha ha!"

ISIC's battle chassis changed rapidly into the form of a massive cannon. With a cackle and a cannon blast, the hunter was splattered into a thousand pieces. Veil walkers let out another screech and a massive varelsi portal formed near the buried UPR base. All the while Toby was killing varelsi skulks left and right. Launching Arc mines as ISIC decimated a veil walker was all Toby could do.

Turns out it's actually a good thing ISIC was there for backup. Toby just hoped he didn't have to be on the other end of that level of destruction.

"Heeeyyy! You started without me?! That's not fair!"

Purple orbs of shadowfire began flying past Berg and splashed against his energy shield. Spiked rings appeared beneath the other veil walker as a shadowfire pillar destroyed its energy shield and left its body charred and burned. It glowed with a new fury and began to charge a barrage attack. Before it could do anything, a gun hulk appeared from the massive portal above it and crushed it. The ensuing shockwave sent skulks staggering and ISIC recoiling. The gun hulk roared with a fury one could only expect from a two story living cannon-beast.

Toby frantically checked Berg's sensors for Orendi, but could find no trace of her. Berg's penguin icon shrugged and a big question mark appeared above its head.

"What do you mean you can't tell where she is?!"

The sounds around them started to turn into a jumbled mess of brass instruments and awful guitar riffs. Orendi's voice started shouting strange jumbles of words that began to sound a lot like song lyrics.

"OooooooooOoohhhh There was no other WAYYYY! They had said all there was to SAAAYY! She knew it was her FATE! IT WAS NEVER EVER TOO LATE! HWAHAHAH!!!"

Shadowfire pillars began to appear beneath skulks, leaving Toby panicking and wondering if he would get caught in the cross fire. After a terrible guitar solo the brass instruments began playing yet again. A massive projection of Orendi's head appeared behind the gun hulk and four massive red eyes glowed menacingly in the dark.

"AND IT WAS LOVE THAT SPURNED HER INTO THE SHOWER OF MURDDDEEERRR!!! HWHAAHAHAH!"

The air around Toby crackled and started to spark. The smell of ozone overcame his nostrils, and Berg automatically kicked in the personal atmosphere again. ISIC turned towards the gun hulk and Orendi's head and stared in awe. Shadowfire appeared all around the gun hulk and consumed it with a fierceness Toby had never seen before. Somehow Orendi was in control in this realm to a scary degree.

As the gun hulk roared in agony it burned and began to melt entirely. ISIC's battle chassis reverted back to mobility mode.

"That is brilliant! Say! Orendi! Think you can do that to me?"

All four eyes and Orendi's projection looked up and to the right as if she was thinking. Toby stood in awe. He had never seen Orendi think about destroying something before.

"Mmmm. Nope!"

Her face disappeared into the darkness with a wicked laugh. ISIC and Toby were left standing in the void. ISIC looked at Toby and his arms dropped.

"Oh to feel the sweet grip of nothingness."

A pixelated frowny face floated above ISIC's head in the glass stasis chamber. Toby shrugged and looked around.

"Uhhhh... Orendi? How do we get out of here?"

No answer. Berg's penguin icon placed its flipper underneath its chin in thought. The words *Scanning* flashed over its head. After a moment, it shrugged and a pixelated question mark appeared above its head. Toby looked at ISIC who shrugged as well. A comm channel opened and a broken signal made it difficult to understand who it was.

"To... ell... re yo..."

A knocking noise shook the entire void. The ground beneath them heaved and rose. The UPR base in the distance began to sink entirely into the void, followed by the Ekkunar branch and eventually chunks of Bliss and Tempest until there was nothing left but black. Another knocking noise came, this time much more forceful. The ground beneath ISIC and Toby shattered. They fell into nothingness. Toby didn't much like that.

A varelsi portal opened beneath them as they fell, slamming them down onto the asteroid in front of Orendi's hovel. Staring at them from the door was Reyna and Whiskey Foxtrot, both with their weapons drawn and ready.

"There you are! Where the hell were you?!"

Toby and ISIC looked at each other and Toby cocked an eyebrow.

"Uhhh... We have no idea."

Whiskey Foxtrot rested his rifle on his shoulder and grabbed the door to Orendi's house. Ripping it off its hinges, he stepped inside. Looking around, he seemed utterly surprised.

"Wow. Not what I was expecting at all. Well done Orendi. I like the use of wood!"

Toby's head hurt. He knew this mission would turn up stranger than most, but this was ridiculous. Reyna poked her head in and cocked an eyebrow. She signaled to Toby and ISIC and they both began to walk towards the door. ISIC couldn't fit through the door in his battle chassis, so he blew a hole in the wall.

"Hey! You don't gotta go ruining her house ISIC! Strange as it is it looks like she really put a lot of work into this..."

Toby jumped out of Berg and walked through the now massive portal into the small hovel. To the right was a cute kitchen laden with tea making supplies. A rack full of differently labeled teas hung above the sink and a kettle was on the stove. The smell of chamomile and birch filled the entire bottom floor. To his left Toby saw an adorable living room complete with pink flower printed couches, a wooden coffee table with a lamp, and small neatly organized bookshelf.

A small wooden staircase led up to the second floor, with flower printed wallpaper on the walls. Reyna and Whiskey quietly walked up the creaky stairs. Toby wondered why no one was saying anything. Perhaps they were just as perplexed as he was. How could Orendi live in such a well put together place? The varelsi portals seemed more appropriate and less weird than this did.

Toby hopped out of Berg and followed suit up the stairs and he began to hear ska music playing quietly. There was one doorway at the top of the stairs. Reyna looked at Whiskey and grabbed the door handle. Relying on her laser pistol, she opened it slowly and looked inside. Her eyes grew wide and she shook her head.

"Oh hell. Toby, I don't know if you want to see this. Damn Orendi what's wrong witchu?"

Orendi's voice came quietly and calmly through the door in response to Reyna.

"Hello Reyna! So glad you can join me! I was just enjoying my records. Have you heard of this band? They are quite delightful!"

Whiskey laughed and pushed the door open wildly. Reyna leaned against the door way and looked down at Toby with a cocked eyebrow. Toby couldn't help but be curious, though he was sure he wasn't going to like what he saw. *Shower of Murder* was playing in the background, which explained why she was shouting it while utterly decimating that gun hulk. Taking the last few stairs up, Toby's heart stopped for a moment when he saw what Orendi was doing.

The room was filled with penguin-based crochet projects. There was a scarf with penguins sewn into them. A sweater with a penguin crocheted into the pattern. A hat that looked like a penguin head. Plushies were placed tastefully across the room with more flower patterned wallpaper. Though there was one more disturbing part of the room. There was an effigy built from broken pieces of Berg and a candle vigil with pictures of Toby.

"My good penguin sir! So glad you made it! Would you care for some chamomile tea my little lovely?"

The look on Orendi's face was sheer glee. Her razor teeth bore a smile that would make a cheshire cat jealous. She put down the four needles she had in each hand as she was furiously crocheting what appeared to be another plushie. Toby felt light headed. This was more than just thinking he was cute. This was obsession.

"Uhhh... No thanks... I was just going... to vomit I think. Yeah."

Orendi continued to smile and batted a hand at the air.

"Oh of course deary! There is a bathroom downstairs if you need it."

Toby felt sick. Now there was a downstairs? Reyna looked at him and decided to go with. Tapping Whiskey on the shoulder, she pointed at Orendi.

"Make sure she stays here, I need words with her. Come on Toby, we better check out this downstairs."

Whiskey kicked the effigy with his foot, only to find it was fastened to the floor.

"Ow! Damnit you better not hog all the fun!"

Crashing could be heard downstairs, so Toby and Reyna made down as quickly as they could. In his haste, Toby slipped and fell down the last two stairs and made a face plant. ISIC sat on the couch with his battle chassis, which surprisingly supported him just fine.

"Pendles? What are you doing here?"

Reyna noticed Pendles before Toby. The crashing must have come from Pendles sifting through cupboards for valuables.

"Oh, 'ey dere boss! Just checkin' up on a contract is all."

Reyna picked Toby up and placed him back on his feet. Shaking her head, she noticed the door right next to the staircase that led them up. Reyna grabbed the handle for the door and opened it slowly. A familiar low-pitched noise began to fill the room as a varelsi portal appeared in the doorway. Reyna and Toby stared at it for a moment. Reyna looked down at Toby and shook her head again.

"I'm sorry I asked you to do this alone Toby. I'm just glad I bailed Whiskey's ass out in time to get here to help."

Toby composed himself and climbed into Berg.

"It's ok Reyna. I made it here just fine alone! Although I was glad to have ISIC's help."

ISIC laughed and stood up off the couch.

"Let's not forget that I'm here to capture or kill Orendi. Unless you're willing to-"

Toby interrupted him before he could say it.

"No. Let's just check out this portal please?"

Reyna nodded and ISIC sighed. Toby realized at that moment Berg was not going to fit into a single doorway. Reyna caught on quick, and began to call for Whiskey.

"Whiskey! Get your ass down here! Toby will keep an eye on Orendi, we're checking out this Varelsi portal!"

His footsteps sounded like a stampede as he furiously jumped down two stairs at a time.

"We get to kill varelsi?! Awesome!"

Pendles was still sifting through cupboards in the kitchen.

"Pendles, you're comin' too."

His snake eyes stared daggers at her like she was interrupting something important. She flipped him off and pointed at the portal.

"Don't forget you're a rogue by contract. Get your ass in there!"

Pendles rolled his eyes and shrugged. Pulling his kama from his belt, he slithered into the portal as he began to stealth and disappear. Whiskey jumped head first in, and Reyna followed suit while shaking her head.

Toby sat silently in Berg while ISIC sat back down on the couch. The faint sound of another *Shower of Murder* track played upstairs while Orendi hummed along to the tune. A pixelated exclamation point appeared above Berg's penguin icon.

After a moment it covered it's face with it's flipper in a facepalm gesture. Toby wondered what that could possibly mean. It didn't take long for him to find out as he started to hear something else next to him. It sounded like someone beat boxing guitar riffs. There was really only one person that could be. He couldn't see him, but Toby knew exactly what was going on.

It started getting louder and louder, until finally it was a full blown guitar riff jam solo beat-box style. The noise was now right next to him.

"Hey Mike. You should go in that portal."

Oscar Mike appeared next to him as his stealth field faded. He was pretending to play a riff on his gun as he stood.

"Portal?! You mean there's varelsi to face stab with bullets?! I'm in bro!"

Oscar charged into the portal while still pretending to play a guitar riff. Toby sighed and looked at the floor. He wondered what could be happening in there with all of them. He didn't suppose they were in much trouble if Orendi was in control like she was before. A yawning noise came from upstairs and the music stopped.

Slow footsteps creaked the boards of the stairs as Orendi appeared drowsily. She rubbed her eye, one on her face anyway, and looked at Toby with the other.

"I need to use the water closet."

Toby watched as she lazily walked into the varelsi portal while scratching her head under her hat. The hum of ISIC's projector and Berg's core was all that was left in the quiet and strange little house.

"So... Are you sure you don't want to help me end this sad excuse of an existence?"

Toby rolled his eyes and ignored ISIC altogether.

After what seemed a lot longer time than should have taken for a bathroom trip, Orendi finally emerged from the portal lazily and walked back upstairs. There was still no sign of the others.

Turning off the game of Tic-Tac-Toe he had been playing with Berg, he glanced at Orendi, then ISIC.

"So... Did you fall in?"

This was perhaps one of Toby's most awkward moments in recent memory. Thankfully the awkwardness was killed by Reyna tripping out of the portal and nearly landing face first on the floor. Her power gauntlet had burns all over it and her hair was more messed up than Toby had ever seen it before. Whiskey Foxtrot emerged in much the same fashion, except with his rifle firing a three round burst as he fell onto his arm and the bullets pinged off of Toby's shield. Pendles gracefully exited and slithered right back to the cupboards to search for valuables.

Oscar Mike came out last, stumbling and crashing into the wall near the front door. His battle armor looked well worn, and there were dings from bullets all over it.

"Orendi! Why the hell is *that* in your freakin' *basement*?"

Reyna looked pissed. She stood up and stormed up the stairs screaming obscenities. Slamming the door, Shower of Murder began playing full blast as Reyna began scolding Orendi. ISIC looked at Toby and three exclamation points hovered in a red hologram in his battle chassis. Oscar Mike and Whiskey stood up and started laughing about how many varelsi they had obliterated.

"Yeah bro, sorry about the few dings. I get a little carried away when I go full auto."

Oscar held his hand up in a high five.

"Are you kidding me bro?! That was *awesome*! You better do it every time we're in a fight together!"

Whiskey grabbed a bullet from his belt and held it in his hand as he high-fived Oscar Mike. They slapped so hard it sparked the bullet to fire and it went straight through the floor.

"Yeah! Bullet five!"

They bumped chests as Pendles shouted with glee.

"I *bloody knew it*! She *does* have one!"

Dangling from his tail by the handle, he held an ornate teapot. Gold trim with flower patterns and a forest green base made Toby wonder what was so special about it.

"Uhhh... Pendles why are you excited about a tea pot?"

Toby couldn't help but ask. He knew he wasn't the only one wondering.

"*This* my friend is no ordinary teapot! It's a vintage pot crafted by the Eldrid! Or something like that anyway. Point is, sells for quite a bit I believe. 'old on, there's somefing in it!"

His interest piqued, he opened the lid on the pot and looked inside. Staring for a moment inside the teapot, he got a strange blank look on his face. Oscar Mike and Whiskey were still talking about how awesome their latest varelsi genocide went. Pendles closed the teapot lid and non-chalantly began to walk towards the door.

"Well, I got what I came 'ere for. Take 'er easy mates!"

Stealthily and no doubtedly slipping all the way out to the door, the Shower of Murder song ended as well as the screaming. The door upstairs opened and Reyna appeared around the corner with Orendi in tow.

"Alright, we're done here. ISIC, you're not getting Orendi. But I can promise you there will be a *thorough* punishment planned in the near future. Toby, can we all go back to your workshop? There are some things we rogues need to discuss."

ISIC stood up in protest at first, then thought for a moment.

"If I try to kill you will you actually kill me back?"

Reyna, Whiskey, Oscar, and Toby all shook their heads no. Orendi shrugged.

"Sure, why not?"

Reyna took her hat and held it above her head out of reach.

"No, there will be no killing here. Tell Kleese I'll get in contact with him and we will *negotiate* terms of her punishment for whatever the hell she did this time."

ISIC slumped down in disappointment, with a frowny face emoticon projecting on the chassis. Sitting down on the couch, he relaxed again.

"Oh well, I'll tell him later. Mind if I chill here for a bit until then?"

Reyna thought about it a moment and cocked an eyebrow.

"Are you gonna destroy Orendi's place while we're gone?"

ISIC looked directly at her and laughed.

"Of course I am!"

Orendi began to protest, but Reyna shoved her hat back down onto her head.

"Fine, But that will be part of her punishment. Whiskey, Toby, Pendles-"

Toby raised a flipper and interjected.

"Pendles left already Reyna."

Rolling her eyes she got even more annoyed. She no doubt opened a channel to him and began shouting at him.

"Pendles you better get yo *ass* over to Toby's workshop on the double! And *stop stealing his stuff!*"

Toby was shocked. He didn't know Reyna knew about the theft.

"Wait, you *know* he's stealing from me?"

Reyna shook her head.

"We'll discuss this *later*. Right now, we need to get all rogues to your workshop and pronto! Ghalt is calling us all back for an operation."

Oscar Mike slouched and hung his head.

"Man... I'm not a rogue. Where am *I* gonna go?!"

Reyna took a deep breath, rubbed her temple, and sighed heavily.

"Oh my god Oscar, you can come with us! Not like we won't be meeting up with Ghalt soon enough. Besides, we might still have some Jennerit stragglers to kill and backup is always nice."

Oscar cheered and high fived Whiskey Foxtrot.

"Honorary Rogue for a day! Suck it ISIC!"

ISIC didn't even respond. He just sat quietly on the couch waiting for them to leave so he could destroy the house.

"Right, whatever. Now let's just get going already!"

As they all began to exit the house, Oscar Mike started to do a beat boxing guitar riff again.

"Mike! Shut it!"

He stood with a blank stare for a moment, then hit a button on his wrist band. Turning invisible, he started beat boxing another guitar riff. Whiskey joined in by beatboxing drums. Reyna gritted her teeth and growled in frustration. Toby wondered if Oscar knew if his stealth just meant he couldn't be seen. He also wondered why Orendi hadn't protested more when ISIC said he was going to destroy her house.

Sometimes being a Battleborn was fun. Sometimes it was just... really, really strange.

End